Fact Sheet 1

PREVENTING FAMILY VIOLENCE: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The Family Violence Prevention Initiative is a multi-departmental, government-community partnership established in 1992 to prevent and respond to the problem of family violence.

The Initiative brings government departments and community agencies together to address family violence effectively. The Initiative works to coordinate activities, guide policy development, develop protocols and procedures for a coordinated service response, train professionals, raise public awareness and provide information, consultation, and advice.

The Family Violence Prevention Initiative reports to the Deputy Ministers' Committee on Social Policy, a committee that represents the Departments of Community Services, Health, Education, Justice, and Housing and Municipal Affairs. The Initiative is comprised of these five departments, each with their own internal Family Violence Committee, and a number of groups and individuals with an interest in family violence including transition houses, men's intervention programs, the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Dartmouth Seniors' Service Centre, the Nova Scotia Council for the Family, aboriginal and ethno-cultural communities (Mi'kmaq Family Treatment Centre, Metro Immigrant Settlement Association), the African Canadian community, the Senior Citizens' Secretariat, the Disabled Persons' Commission, and others with an interest in the safety and well-being of women, children, seniors, persons with disabilities and others vulnerable to abuse. The Initiative also supports and liaises with 17 community-based Interagency Committees on Family Violence around the province.

WHAT DOES THE INITIATIVE DO?

Coordination and Leadership

- coordinates efforts to prevent and respond to the problem of family violence
- develops strategic plans to guide the work of the Initiative and its members and provides input on policy issues
- serves as a focal point for information about government and community activities pertaining to family violence
- keeps abreast of emerging trends, current research, and new developments in the field; maintains a central body of research, knowledge and expertise on family violence; and provides advice and consultation to others upon request
- works to improve coordination among service providers at government and community levels to ensure the needs of victims and their families are met

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Policy Development

- ensures government policy, programs, services and activities are effective, consistent and coordinated within and among departments
- evaluates activities to ensure they are effective in preventing and responding to the problem of family violence

Public Education and Awareness

- increases awareness of the problem of family violence to encourage action to respond; to change attitudes and behaviours to those which promote healthy relationships; and to ensure victims and their families are aware of services available
- sponsors Family Violence Prevention Week, an annual multi-media public education campaign held in February to raise awareness about family violence
- distributes a semi-annual newsletter on subjects of topical interest
- produces publications, fact sheets, brochures, directory of services, procedures manuals/protocol guidelines for a coordinated response to woman, child and elder abuse, bookmarks, lapel pins, posters, mugs, and other items to increase awareness
- maintains a Resource Centre of over 2000 audio-visual and print materials available on loan to the public free of charge
- provides a search capacity with links to all Nova Scotia university, public, Legislative and government libraries as well as the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence
- maintains a web site of information available for download with "hot links" to other relevant sites

Professional Education

- designs and delivers pre-service and in-service training to increase the ability of professionals and service providers to identify and respond effectively to victims and their families (in partnership with Interagency Committees, professional associations, educational institutions, Departments, and others)
- delivers inter-disciplinary collegial relations training to enhance the ability of professionals to work effectively with one another
- delivers an "Executive Briefing" to key government and community leaders to create a climate of support for family violence prevention activities
- sponsors conferences, delivers workshops, develops curriculum, and delivers training upon request

Advocacy

- encourages broad acceptance of responsibility to end family violence, recognizing that the problem is shared
- emphasizes the importance of primary prevention, early intervention, and the promotion of healthy family relationships
- works to ensure a victims' perspective is considered in the formulation of policy; consults with victims' advocates, service providers, and communities to identify issues of concern and facilitate resolution

Support to Government and Communities

- supports departments and communities in their efforts to achieve their goals and objectives in addressing family violence
- supports local Interagency Committees

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Fact Sheet 2
FAMILY VIOLENCE

WHAT IS FAMILY VIOLENCE?

Family violence is abuse or neglect that occurs between individuals related by affection, kinship, dependency or trust. It is fundamentally an abuse of power and betrayal of trust. Family violence crosses all socio-economic, religious and ethno-cultural boundaries and affects all types of families, whether traditional or non-traditional in nature.

PREVALENCE

- 1 in 4 women in an intimate relationship has been abused by her partner at least once in her lifetime. The percentage of ever-married women (women in a common-law or married relationship) who have experienced wife assault is 29% in Canada and 32% (almost 1 in 3) in Nova Scotia.[1]
- In 1996, family members were responsible for the majority of assaults against very young children. Almost 70% of victims under the age of 3 were physically assaulted by family members.[2]
- In 1998-99, Child Protection received 6927 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. As of March 31, 1999, there were 2523 child protection cases open. There were 1388 children brought into care during the year.[3]
- 4% of the elderly living in their own homes have suffered one or more forms of abuse.[4]
- The degree of risk of sexual abuse of persons with disabilities appears to be at least 150% of that for individuals of the same sex and similar age without disabilities.[5]
- A 1988 study of 245 women with disabilities found that 40% had been raped, abused or assaulted, 53% of women who had been disabled from birth or early childhood had been abused, and 10% of women who had been abused sought help from transition houses.[6]
- In 1994/95, 38% of the Adult Protection caseload was comprised of elder abuse and caregiver neglect. 32% (318) of the caseload was comprised of persons with a disability. Of those, 115 (36%) experienced abuse or neglect by a caregiver. In 1996/97, 37% of the overall Adult Protection caseload was comprised of abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults. (The remainder was self-neglect).[7]
- Older women continue to be abused by their partners as they age. In 1996, older women were most often victimized by a spouse (42%) while, for older men, the accused was most often an adult child.[8]
- The largest proportion of family homicides (49%) involved spouses. One in every five family homicides was a child killed by a parent (22%) and another 10% were parents killed by children.[9]

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TYPES OF ABUSE

- **Physical abuse:** the non-accidental, wilful infliction of physical pain or injury such as slapping, kicking, choking, punching, burning, stabbing and/or shooting. It also includes shaking a baby.
- **Sexual abuse:** any form of sexual activity with a person without the consent of that person, with the exception of children who, in most circumstances, cannot consent.[10] Sexual abuse may include unwanted sexual touching, sexual relations without voluntary consent, or the forcing or coercing of degrading, humiliating or painful sexual acts.
- **Psychological/Emotional abuse:** behaviour intended to control, humiliate, intimidate, instill fear or diminish a person's sense of identity, dignity or self worth. It can include threats of harm to the victim, harm or threats of harm towards the victim's children or family members, destruction of prized personal possessions, and threats of harm or actual acts of violence against pets. It can include chronic verbal aggression, belittling, repeatedly telling a child he or she is "stupid", forcing a victim to do degrading things like eating cigarette butts or licking the floor, speeding through traffic to deliberately frighten the victim, denying or threatening to deny a vulnerable adult contact with family, friends or grandchildren, playing "mind games" such as Russian roulette, and other such acts.
- **Financial exploitation/ Economic abuse:** the withholding of finances, trickery, fraud, theft, misappropriation of funds or property, misuse of power of attorney, theft of pension cheques, forcing a person to change the terms of their will, misuse of assets or theft of securities or bonds. It also includes withholding money needed for basic essentials such as food, clothing, medication and transportation, forcing a victim to hand over his or her earnings, or denial of the right of an individual to control their own finances.
- **Neglect:** the failure to provide the physical necessities of life such as food, drink, clothing, adequate housing, personal care and medical attention. Isolation, abandonment and chronic failure to provide supervision are also neglect. Victims of this type of abuse tend to be children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities.
- **Spiritual abuse:** belittling or ridiculing one's spiritual/religious beliefs, refusing to allow one to practise one's own religion, or forcing one to submit to a new belief system.

Most forms of abuse occur in combination with one another.[11]

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

The populations most vulnerable to family violence include women, children, older adults and persons with disabilities. Men can be victims of family violence as well, particularly if they have a disability or are elderly, though this is not as prevalent.

WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

Perpetrators can be partners, parents, children or caregivers. Most perpetrators of sexual abuse are adult men.

CAUSAL FACTORS

One causal theory on its own does not explain the totality of family violence; there are likely a combination or a number of these factors at play which account for family violence.

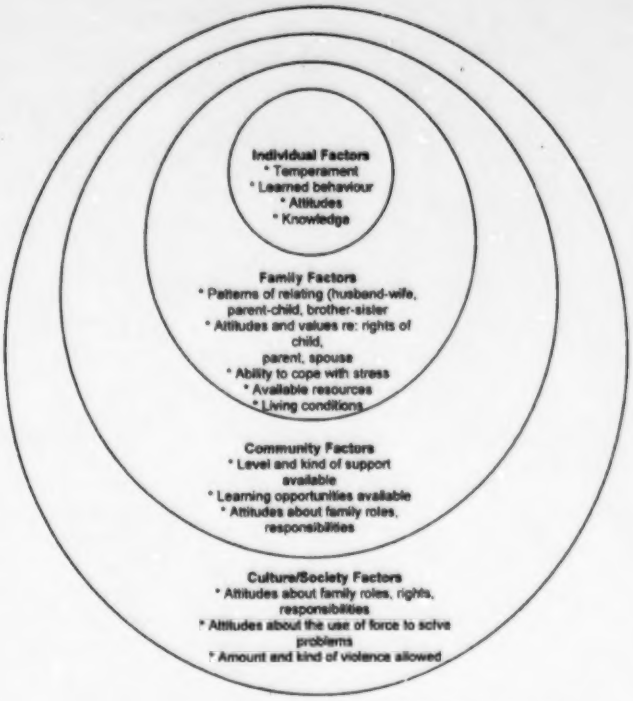
- **Social learning theory**: This theory suggests that abusive behaviour is learned from institutions within society, primarily the family. Societal norms, values, and behaviours are also communicated through societal institutions and influences such as peers, school, church, workplace, community and the media. Those who witnessed abuse in their family as children often learn to normalize this behaviour and can repeat these patterns of abuse in adulthood. Boys may become abusive in their adult relationships and girls tolerant of abusive behaviour. Children who witness violence may lack the opportunity to learn non-violent behaviours, problem-solving skills and appropriate anger management skills.
- **Psychopathology**: This theory suggests that abusive behaviour may be the result of mental illness or a personality disorder. We know, however, that not all abusers are mentally ill.
- **Psychological traits**: Some research posits that some abusers possess certain psychological traits that cause them to be prone to violent behaviour (e.g. hostility, anger, insecurity). Perpetrators of child sexual abuse, for example, may suffer low self-esteem or emotional dependency, causing them to avoid adult relationships and behave inappropriately around children.
- **Attachment theory**: Research has shown that adults who were insecurely attached or bonded to their caregiver as children can have difficulty dealing rationally with a partner, especially if that partner threatens to leave. Often insecurely attached adults suffer anxiety and anger, which may provoke an assault.
- **Biological theories**: Recent biological theories suggest that certain physiological, genetic or neurological abnormalities can cause violent behaviour.[12]

INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

There are many factors that contribute to family violence and can make victims vulnerable to abuse. While these factors do not *cause* abuse, they can exacerbate an abuser's existing potential to abuse. Some influential factors can include poverty or unemployment, ill health, substance abuse, lack of resources or a support network.

The following illustrates the contributing factors to family violence. To be effective, a prevention strategy must address all four areas.

Factors Contributing to Family Violence[13]


Individual Factors
* Temperament
* Learned behaviour
* Attitudes
* Knowledge
Family Factors
* Patterns of relating (husband-wife, parent-child, brother-sister
* Attitudes and values re: rights of child, parent, spouse
* Ability to cope with stress
* Available resources
* Living conditions
Community Factors
* Level and kind of support available
* Learning opportunities available
* Attitudes about family roles, responsibilities
Culture/Society Factors
* Attitudes about family roles, rights, responsibilities
* Attitudes about the use of force to solve problems
* Amount and kind of violence allowed

Alberta Office for the Prevention of Family Violence, "Stopping Abuse Before it Starts: Thoughts on Prevention"

Individual Factors: All of us choose to behave the way we do because of our past experiences and the perceptions and beliefs we have of the world, ourselves and others. We learn certain behaviours and develop our own attitudes, skills and knowledge. Each of us has access to different resources and we interpret, in our own way, the situations in which we find ourselves. All of these factors, and many others, affect our behaviour. Poor impulse control, for example, combined with witnessing abuse of one's mother, a belief that women are inferior to men, that physical violence is an appropriate response to anger, and the knowledge or belief that one is unlikely to suffer serious sanctions, for abusive acts may increase the likelihood of abuse.

Family Factors: Families provide the settings where abuse takes place. The way they are organized, who is supposed to do what, the way people relate to each other, the resources they have at their disposal, their values, goals and attitudes will all influence whether family members will experience nurturing or abusive relationships.

Community Level: The manner in which communities organize their services, particularly if the services are not accessible to some families or are inappropriate, can contribute to abuse in families in several ways:

- The absence of needed services during difficult times can add to any stress the family may already be experiencing.
- Communities without accessible and appropriate services for families are giving the message that families should be self-sufficient and, if they are not, there is something wrong with them. For those families who do need services, this contributes to feelings of incompetence, which in themselves produce stress.

- Communities which do not ensure that needed services are available and accessible to families do nothing to overcome the isolation, which is another contributing factor.

Societal Level: Two kinds of factors contribute to family violence at the societal level.

Uneven distribution of resources in any society forces some families to have insufficient means to meet the needs of their members. This causes considerable stress which contributes to the use of violence. As well, it keeps some family members trapped in abusive situations because of the absence of alternatives open to them.

Societal attitudes that condone the use of force as a legitimate means of controlling people, of settling disputes or of winning in competitive situations contribute to family violence in both direct and indirect ways. The communication of such attitudes by way of television and movies in particular profoundly influences people who are inclined to use violence to get their way. Any attitude that devalues certain members of society because of their gender or age contributes to the devaluing of those people within families.

CONSEQUENCES OF FAMILY VIOLENCE

The consequences of family violence are extensive and affect not only victims but the community as a whole.

- **Human costs**

Family violence causes immense pain and suffering and creates feelings of low self-esteem, constant fear, dependency, isolation and hopelessness. It contributes to ill health, and, most seriously, can result in serious physical injury or even death. It can have serious long term consequences causing developmental delay and emotional and behavioural problems in children.

- **Economic costs**

Studies have estimated that the economic, health, social and legal costs of family violence in Canada reach $4.2 billion annually or $1.5 billion for health sector costs alone.[14]
This excludes costs of Child Protection, Adult Protection and a range of related services.

Lost productivity: Living in a violent family environment can affect a person's productivity in the workplace, affecting business productivity and profitability, and may result in illness, long term disability, loss of work for the victim, and lost tax revenues for governments due to death, injury or incarceration.

Legal: Family violence results in increased civil, family, and criminal justice system costs such as policing, public prosecution, legal representation, Legal Aid, corrections, Victims' Services, parole and criminal injuries compensation.

Medical: Costs can include ambulance services, emergency medical care, hospital stays, drug and alcohol centres, prescription drugs and dental treatments.

Social services: Many victims of family violence must seek the aid of social services such as income assistance, counselling programs, transition houses, foster care, emergency housing, child protection and adult protection.

Intergenerational violence: Though it is not inevitable, exposure to violence in the home can increase the likelihood that children will perpetuate abusive behaviour as adults.

Destruction of our moral and social fabric: The existence of family violence in our society greatly undermines the right of all citizens to live free of violence and injustice. Because family violence is destructive, it ultimately tears at our social fabric.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Responding to family violence requires long term, dedicated efforts and a multi-faceted approach. It is the responsibility of both government and the community. As individuals, colleagues, family and community members, we can contribute to the prevention of family violence by adopting a zero tolerance attitude towards it and by becoming aware of available resources and approaches to prevention and intervention.

- **Individual responsibility:** Abused women seek the help of friends and family most often to deal with family violence. It is important to listen empathetically, offer support and assistance, and suggest the person speak with those who can help. Do not blame the victim.
- **Promotion of equality:** Support equality to ensure that women, children, seniors, persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups are afforded equal treatment in all aspects of society. Counter negative, discriminatory and limiting beliefs which seek to hurt and devalue others like sexism, racism, homophobia and ageism.
- **Education:** Public awareness and education are key to ensuring that the community is aware of the prevalence of family violence and that victims know of available sources of help. Community members can seek out and support the resources needed to provide assistance and promote family violence prevention.
- **Resources:** Several resources are available for victims of family violence. Community members can support resources such as transition houses, help lines, drug and alcohol dependency services, etc.
- **Reporting:** In order to protect victims of abuse, every person is legally required to report suspicions of abuse and neglect with regard to children and vulnerable adults who, by reason of physical or mental infirmity, are unable to protect themselves.[15]

ENDNOTES

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9 Ibid.

10 Refer to the *Criminal Code of Canada* for age of consent provisions.

11 Other more rare forms of abuse include ritual abuse and Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. Female genital mutilation is also practised in some segments of society but is illegal in Canada. Contact the FVPI for further information.

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[15] *Nova Scotia Children and Family Services Act*, Sec. 23, and *Nova Scotia Adult Protection Act*, Section 5.

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Fact Sheet 3

WOMAN/PARTNER ABUSE

WHAT IS WOMAN/PARTNER ABUSE?

Woman/partner abuse is the physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse of persons by their intimate partners. While men can be victims, research indicates that the overwhelming majority are women[1]. Woman/partner abuse takes place in the context of marriage or in

- common law relationships
- dating
- current or former relationships
- same or opposite sex couples

PREVALENCE

A 1993 Statistics Canada survey found that:

- 1 in 4 women (or 29% of women who have ever been married or lived with a partner) have experienced physical or sexual violence in an intimate relationship.
- 1 in 5 incidents was serious enough to involve physical injury.
- One-half of all Canadian women have experienced at least one incident of violence since the age of 16.
- 63% of women assaulted by a past or current partner were victimized more than once.
- Women with a household income of $15,000 and under are twice as likely to be battered as women in general.[2]

In Nova Scotia:

- 32% of ever-married women in Nova Scotia have experienced violence.[3]
- In Nova Scotia, each year approximately 1000 women and 850 children are admitted to the province's 10 Transition Houses. Another 18,000 distress calls are made to the crisis lines for help.[4]
- Of 929 cases of spousal violence reported to police in Nova Scotia in a 1992 sixth month survey, 92% involved female victims.[5]
- In interviews conducted with abused women, 24% of victims were physically or sexually assaulted during their husband's exercise of court-ordered access to the children.[6]
- Between 1974–1992, 39 women in Nova Scotia were murdered by their spouse.[7]

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TYPES OF ABUSE

Abuse is typically cyclical in nature, escalates in severity and frequency over time, and takes many forms.

- **Physical abuse:** the non-accidental, willful infliction of pain or injury such as slapping, shoving, punching, kicking, burning, stabbing and shooting.
- **Sexual abuse:** any form of sexual activity with a person without the consent of that person. Sexual abuse may include unwanted sexual touching, sexual relations without voluntary consent, or the forcing or coercing of degrading, humiliating or painful sexual acts.
- **Psychological/emotional abuse:** behaviour intended to control, humiliate, intimidate, instill fear or diminish a person's sense of self worth. This includes persistent verbal aggression, forcing the victims to do degrading things such as eating cigarette butts or licking the floor, forced confinement, stalking, isolation, degradation, threats, or deliberately doing things to frighten the victim such as speeding through traffic or playing with weapons. Threats to harm or kill the children, other family members, pets or prized possessions is also abuse. Abusers may also threaten to remove, hide or prevent access to children.
- **Economic abuse:** the involuntary control of a victim's financial resources, including withholding money for basic necessities such as food, clothing, diapers, medication, and transportation. As well, economic abuse can include preventing a victim from getting to work or denying access to employment altogether.

IMPACT ON WOMEN

Abuse has consequences that last long after women have left the relationship.[8]

- feelings of powerlessness
- low self-esteem
- mistrust of others
- fear of relationships/men
- nightmares, insomnia
- panic attacks, acute anxiety
- constant fear of abuser
- fear of leaving the house/keeping shades drawn
- sleeping with baseball bats, weapons
- relocation to avoid detection and/or limit or cease contact with friends/family
- compliant behaviour
- emotional turmoil, inability to concentrate, nervous tension

IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Children suffer detrimental effects from being exposed to the abuse of their mothers and in 30-40% of the cases, are themselves abused.[9]

- **Short term consequences:** Children who witness abuse at home may suffer short term effects such as depression, behavioural problems, and anxiety.

- **Long term effects:** These may include behavioural problems extending into teenaged years, including getting in trouble with the law, replicating abusive patterns in their own relationships, and running away from home.
- **Developmental:** Research has shown that young children exposed to violence exhibit high emotional and behavioural needs, developmental delays and a decreased ability to perform well in school.

If you suspect a child is being harmed by exposure to an abusive environment, you have a legal responsibility to report your concerns to a child welfare agency or the police. Recognizing the serious effects of exposure to violence in the home, the *Children and Family Services Act* Sec. 22 (2)(i) states that a child may be in need of protective services where "the child has suffered physical or emotional harm caused by being exposed to repeated domestic violence by or toward a parent or guardian of the child, and the child's parent or guardian fails or refuses to obtain services or treatment to remedy or alleviate the violence."

WHY DO WOMEN STAY?

While many women leave an abusive relationship, others choose to stay for a variety of reasons.

- **Hope**

  In many abusive relationships, the violence is not constant but rather emerges in cycles or phases. As such, an abuser is capable of being a "good guy" during a honeymoon phase of the abuse cycle. Women often hope that their partner will change, especially when they see evidence that their partner is capable of being loving, caring, and contrite. As well, abusers often try to atone for an incident of abuse by being apologetic or even buying gifts for the victim, which can cause women to cling to the hope that the abuse will not recur.

- **Love**

  Most women love their partners. It is the abuse itself that they hate. Most battered women, when interviewed, will say what they want most is for the abusive behaviour to stop.

- **Fear**

  Most women stay in abusive relationships because they fear what are often lethal consequences of leaving. Leaving constitutes such a threat to the abuser that it is unthinkable to let his partner go. Often, an abuser will prefer homicide or murder-suicide over seeing his partner leave. Many women who do leave continue to be stalked, threatened, harassed and physically or sexually assaulted. Abusers will often threaten harm against a woman's friend or family, can threaten abuse against children or abduction of children.

- **Shame**

  Abuse often generates feelings of shame, denial, humiliation or self-blame. Many victims of abuse do not want friends, family or members of their community to know about their situation, and will often try to conceal or "explain away" evidence of abuse.

- **Concern for family**

  Many times there is a reluctance to reveal abuse for fear of involving other family members in dangerous situations or "burdening" them with information with which they cannot cope.

- **Isolation**

  Victims of abuse are often isolated from the social support network of family, friends and co-workers. Isolation is one of the major ways in which an abuser controls the victim, causing them to lose a sense of independence and perspective. Victims can also be geographically and physically isolated, especially if the reside in rural areas and do not have access to information and resources.

- **Lack of resources**

  Services may not be available, accessible or appropriate to the needs of victims and their families. Clearly this can be a serious problem for victims of abuse.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **Support:** Communities can support available resources for abused women and their children. Many of these resources include transition houses, help lines, employment training programs, etc. Research shows that abused women seek out the support of friends and family more than anyone else (at a rate of 44%).[10] It is important to listen empathetically, offer support and assistance, and suggest the person speak with those who can help. Do not blame the victim.
- **Education:** Public education is important to increase awareness and change attitudes and behaviour to stop abuse.
- **Prevention:** Teach young children non-violent ways of resolving conflict, challenge sex role stereotyping, promote healthy intimate relationships and basic respect for the dignity and worth of another person.
  - — Implement measures to counter loss of self-esteem in girls and teach boys acceptable ways of relating to girls in intimate relationships.
  - — Ensure family violence is covered in marriage preparation courses.
  - — Teach youth about dating violence and the elements of healthy relationships.
  - — As parents, model healthy relationships in your own intimate relationships.

ENDNOTES

1 For further discussion of this issue, see Dobash and Dobash. "The Myth of Sexual Symmetry" in *Social Problems*. Vol 39, no. 1, 1992; and Tutty, Leslie (1999). *Husband Abuse: An Overview of Research Perspectives*. Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence; and Gelles, Richard J. [et al] (1993). *Current Controversies on Family Violence*. California: Sage Publications.

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Fact Sheet 4

CHILD/YOUTH ABUSE

WHAT IS CHILD ABUSE?

Child abuse is the physical, sexual or emotional maltreatment of a child such that the survival, security or development of a child is endangered/at risk. It also includes chronic and serious neglect. For some, it is the most difficult kind of family violence to understand because it violates our basic beliefs about trust and protection of the vulnerable and innocent. Child abuse can take many forms.

PREVALENCE

- While prevalence rates are not available, of those cases of Shaken Baby Syndrome identified, fathers/boyfriends account for 50–75% of the perpetrators, usually due to violent reactions triggered by stress/poor impulse control (e.g. in response to babies crying).[1]
- In 1996, family members were responsible for the majority of assaults against very young children. Almost 70% of victims under the age of three were physically assaulted by family members, and parents accounted for 85% of these.
- Girls were the victims of assaults by family members more often than were boys. Victims were female in 56% of physical assaults and almost 80% of sexual assaults.[2]
- In 1997, parents were the main perpetrators of assault against children and youth within families. Parents represented 65% of family members accused of physical assaults against children and youth and 44% of those accused of sexual assaults.[3]
- Fathers made up a large majority (80%) of parents accused of assaulting their children.[4]
- Between 1974 and 1996, there were 1,994 victims of homicide under 18 years of age.[5]
- According to a Health Canada study, two thirds of murdered infants are killed by a parent, and this pattern holds for other young children.[6]
- 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 8 boys will be sexually assaulted before they reach the age of 18.[7]
- 23% of all violent crime victims were teenagers (12–19 years of age), double their representation in the population.[8]
- Teens comprised a larger proportion of sexual assault victims than did adults. Four out of every 10 reported sexual assault victims were teens and 4 were children. Teens are also victims of dating violence.[9]

IN NOVA SCOTIA

- In 1998–99, Child Protection received 6927 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. As of March 31, 1999, there were 2523 child protection cases open. There were 1388 children brought into care during the year.[10]

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WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Child abuse is not confined to any one group or social class. It cuts across all ethnic, religious, social and economic backgrounds. Infants and preschoolers, because they are totally dependent, non-verbal and require a great deal of parental care, tend to be the most vulnerable victims of child abuse.

WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

- Perpetrators of child abuse tend to be parents, family members or primary guardians. Others may include friends, helping professionals, teachers and other caregivers who work with children.

PERPETRATORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

- Someone the child knows or trusts, such as a family member or guardian. 1 in 4 offenders is a family member or person in a position of trust or authority.
- 1 in 2 are friends or acquaintances
- Virtually all sexual assailants are male. One in 100 is female.[11]

TYPES OF ABUSE

- **Physical abuse:** the non-accidental, wilful infliction of physical pain or injury such as slapping, kicking, punching, burning, choking, stabbing and/or shooting. Injuries sustained may range from minor bruising, burns, welt or bite marks, to major fractures, broken bones and death. It may result from many actions including the excessive, inappropriate use of discipline. This also includes Shaken Baby Syndrome — shaking a baby in a whiplash motion resulting in injury, permanent disability, and death.[12]
- **Sexual abuse:** refers to a range of sexual activity/behaviour, perpetrated by an adult, adolescent, or someone older than the child, with or without the consent of a child,[13] for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator. Examples include instances where a child is encouraged, coerced, forced or enticed into such acts as sexual molestation, fondling, sexual intercourse, fellatio, cunnilingus, exhibitionism, or any form of sexual exploitation such as juvenile prostitution or pornography.
- **Emotional abuse:** involves verbal attacks against a child or behaviour that causes a diminished sense of self worth, feelings of humiliation and fear. Intimidation, rejection, use of restraints and forced isolation (e.g. locking a child in a closet) are also forms of emotional abuse. Abuse may range from habitual humiliation of the child to withholding life-sustaining nurturing. Lack of nurturing (holding, cuddling, and warm verbal communication) in the early years can be particularly damaging. Emotional abuse is persistent and chronic and results in some degree of emotional damage to the child as evidenced by severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, or self-destructive or aggressive behaviour. Emotional abuse or neglect also includes inappropriately high expectations and demands of the infant/child; a rejecting parent who repeatedly communicates angry feelings toward the child; and the chronic rejecting, ignoring, criticizing, intimidating and terrorizing of the child.

  Children of abused women who witness repeated abuse of their mothers may also be affected similarly and often display these same behaviours.

- **Neglect:** Is an act of chronic and serious omission which causes significant physical emotional and physical harm to the child. Physical neglect is a failure to meet a child's basic physical needs such as food, shelter, clothing, health care and safety from harm. Emotional neglect is the failure to meet a child's emotional needs such as feelings of self worth, belonging and affection. Withdrawal of affection can result in failure to thrive in infants. Chronic refers to a pattern of conduct over time and conveys a marked and substantial departure from the standard of care expected from a reasonable parent.[14]

For a precise definition of the conditions under which a child may be "in need of protective services", see the *Nova Scotia Children and Family Services Act*, Section 22.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

There are a number of factors that can contribute to child abuse.

Psycho dynamic theory: posits that a number of psychological factors may lead people to be abusive. These can include depression, substance abuse, anxiety, a history of abuse, low self-esteem, low tolerance for stress, high levels of family discord and dependency.

Environmental stress theory: argues that certain family stresses, such as poverty, unemployment, and/or the absence of a supportive social network can lead to abusive behaviour.

Interactional theory: suggests that abusive behaviour is generated by problem interactions between the abuser and the child. Problem interactions can be the result of attachment problem, where a child and parent/guardian has failed to bond. Some theorists suggests that parents/guardians who perceive their children as being difficult or defiant are at greater risk of exhibiting abusive behaviour. Researchers have also posited that inadequate pre-and post-natal care can be a contributing factor in child abuse.[15]

IMPACT ON VICTIMS

Child abuse poses serious immediate and long term consequences, including:

- failure to thrive in infants
- physical injury
- fear, acute anxiety, psycho dynamic disorders
- emotional/behavioural problems
- delayed development
- extreme passivity/withdrawal
- extreme aggression
- self-destructive or suicidal behaviour
- feelings of worthlessness, self-blame
- powerlessness
- sexual promiscuity/self-loathing
- inability to concentrate, poor school performance
- social withdrawal, social isolation, self-reported feelings of stigmatization
- psychiatric disorders, acute phobias

- anger, hostility, guilt
- difficulty in problem-solving, resolving social problems, comprehending complex roles[16]

The effects of child abuse can continue into adulthood to impact every aspect of a victim's life, including:

Psychological: anxiety, anger, aggression, feelings of guilt and shame, depression, withdrawal, difficulty in thinking through or resolving social problems.

Physical: weight problems, eating disorders, sleep disturbances, migraine headaches, hypertension, rashes, poor overall health.

Behavioural: developmental delays, fear of strangers, poor socialization skills, bullying behaviour, poor school adjustment, substance abuse, suicide or suicide attempts.

Academic: low overall school performance, grade repetition, disciplinary referrals and suspensions.

Sexual: premature sexual knowledge, promiscuity and dissatisfaction with sex and negative attitudes about sex (in adulthood).

Interpersonal: insecure attachments to parents and caregivers, difficulty in trusting others, relationship problems, fear of intimacy.

Self-perceptual: low self-esteem, feelings of being "out of control", sense of guilt and self- blame for the abuse, self-hatred.

Spiritual: lost sense of faith, loss of spirit or enthusiasm for life.[17]

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **Reporting:** If you suspect a child is being abused or may be at risk of harm, you have a legal responsibility to report your concerns to a child welfare agency or the police.[18]
- **Support:** If a child tells you about an abusive situation, it is important to respond in a supportive manner, listen to the child, reassure him or her that he/she is not to blame, and ensure that the incident is reported to the proper authorities. Many times, child abuse goes unreported because children fear no one will believe them. It is important, however, not to question the child or pursue details as this may compromise an investigation.
- **Education:** Encourage your local schools to develop child abuse prevention programs, support public awareness campaigns, become familiar with available resources in your own community.

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[10] *Child Protection Program Statistics (from Case Management System)* (1999). Family and Children's Services. Nova Scotia: Department of Community Services.

[11] Badgley, Robin (1984). *Sexual Offences Against Children and Youth in Canada.* Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada.

[12] Physical abuse also includes female genital mutilation. Contact the FVPI for further information.

[13] Note that the Criminal Code of Canada describes more fully age of consent issues.

[14] It is important to note that chronic neglect may be easily confused with poverty or ignorance and may be associated with parents who are overwhelmed with other problems. Therefore, attention must be paid to the duration, consistency and pervasiveness of indicators of abuse, including indicators of physical harm.

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[18] *Children and Family Services Act,* Section 23.

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Fact Sheet 5

CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

Child sexual abuse refers to a range of sexual activity/behaviour, perpetrated by an adult, adolescent, or someone older than the child, with or without the consent of a child, for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator. Examples include instances where a child is encouraged, coerced, forced or enticed into such acts as sexual molestation, fondling, sexual intercourse, fellatio, cunnilingus, exhibitionism, or any form of sexual exploitation such as juvenile prostitution or pornography.

PREVALENCE

- In 1996, children under 18 were the victims of 22% of assaults reported to police agencies. They represented a much larger proportion of all sexual assault victims (60%) than physical assault victims (18%).[1]
- Fathers made up the large majority (80%) of parents accused of assaulting their children, accounting for 98% of parents accused of sexual assault and 73% of parents accused of physical assault.[2]
- A 1993 study showed that sexual assaults against children were more likely to be perpetrated by a parent or relative (32%) than were physical assaults (16%).[3]
- The report by the Badgley Commission (1984) estimated that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 10 boys would be sexually abused before they reached the age of 18. In over 75% of the cases, the abuser is a family member or someone well known to the child.[4]

NOVA SCOTIA DATA

- In 1998 in Nova Scotia, of the 162 cases of child abuse recorded on the Child Abuse Register, 75% of those comprised sexual abuse.[5]

WHO ARE THE OFFENDERS?

- Perpetrators are usually someone known to the child, such as a parent, relative, family friend or someone in a position of trust or authority (such as a teacher, coach, or babysitter).
- Some abusers have experienced abuse in their own childhood. Many exhibit a lack of empathy for their victims and often rationalize and minimize their behaviour.
- Offenders are generally divided into two groups. Pedophiles are sexually excited by children and tend to abuse many children. Incestuous offenders abuse within the family and, by virtue of their access to victims, tend to abuse only a few children but for an extended period of time.

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WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

- Victims of sexual abuse can come from a variety of ethnic, economic and social backgrounds.
- Children who are isolated from peers and other family members tend to be most vulnerable to sexual abuse. As well, perpetrators (most commonly pedophiles) have a tendency to target children who appear secluded or lonely.[6]
- One of the reasons why incidents of sexual abuse are perpetrated is that children are often afraid to report the abuse. Children fear the consequences of disclosing information and are many times convinced no one will believe them. They often blame themselves for the abuse or fear retaliation from the abuser if they tell. Children are often cajoled or coerced into abuse by the threat of harm or the promise of reward. As well, very young children are often unable to articulate or understand their experiences, making it difficult for them to disclose their abuse.
- Because children blame themselves, fear dissolution of their family, feel shame or experience abandonment from their family, they sometimes retract truthful allegations of abuse.[7]

IMPACT ON VICTIMS

- **Children and adolescent** victims often suffer from shame, low self-esteem, feelings of isolation, anger, helplessness and fear. Children can develop learning disabilities, their peer socialization abilities are often greatly hampered, and they can exhibit an inability to grow and develop normally. Often children will engage in behaviours that signify a cry for help such as self-mutilation, suicide attempts, running away from home, sexual promiscuity and aggressive behaviour.
- **Adult survivors** can suffer extensive emotional, physical and psychological consequences of abuse which can require years of counselling and treatment. Often adult survivors will depend on certain coping mechanisms to dull the pain of their experiences. Alcohol and drugs are a common way for survivors to forget their past. Many survivors will resort to compulsive behaviours, such as gambling, excessive eating or excessive dieting. Adult survivors can have difficulty holding down a job, maintaining stable relationships, and often demonstrate a lack of proper parenting skills.
- **Female survivors** of sexual abuse have a greater likelihood of becoming involved in an abusive relationship or being raped as adults. Male victims often suffer extreme depression, can become aggressive and abusive, and can also engage in unstable, unhealthy relationships. Although being a victim of sexual abuse does not necessarily lead to becoming an abuser in adulthood, there remains a possibility that abusive behaviour can be replicated in subsequent generations.[8]

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- If you suspect a child or adolescent is being sexually abused, you have a duty to report your suspicions to the police, social services or any other child welfare agency.[9]
- Educate yourself about signs and symptoms of sexual abuse. Keeping in mind that not all indicators necessarily signify abuse, you can alert yourself to physical indicators, behavioural changes and interpersonal changes. For information on indicators of child abuse, consult the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services' *Indicators of Possible Abuse or Neglect* or the Family Violence Prevention Initiative's *Procedures for a Coordinated Response to Child Abuse*.

- The community has a responsibility to commit to the prevention of child sexual abuse. You can become familiar with available support systems and resources, and promote public awareness of the issue through education in schools, workplaces and universities.
- If a child discloses an incident of sexual abuse, it is important to listen to the child, assure the child you believe him or her, and report the disclosure once you have assured the child that it is *not* his or her fault.

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Fact Sheet 6

CHILDREN EXPOSED TO FAMILY VIOLENCE

Children are adversely affected by family violence, either as witnesses of spousal abuse or as direct recipients of the abuse themselves. Even if children in violent households are not the direct targets of abuse, their exposure to acts of violence against a parent, usually their mother, can pose serious and long term consequences.

In its definition of children in need of protective services, Section 22 (2) (i) of the *Children and Family Services Act* of Nova Scotia includes children who witness violence. Recognizing the serious effects of exposure to violence in the home, the *Act* states that a child may be in need of protective services where "the child has suffered physical or emotional harm caused by being exposed to repeated domestic violence by or toward a parent or guardian of the child, and the child's parent or guardian fails or refuses to obtain services or treatment to remedy or alleviate the violence."

PREVALENCE

- In 1993, the Violence Against Women Survey found that, in 39% of violent marriages, children witnessed the violence directed against their mothers by their fathers. This is equivalent to at least 1 million children who have been exposed to some level of violence in their homes.[1]
- A 1995 survey of transition homes in Canada found that there were 2,217 children under the age of 10 living in shelters on one day alone, the majority of which were under 10 years of age. The survey notes that fully 93% of children were accompanying women admitted into shelters because of abuse.[2]
- The Violence Against Women Survey also found that women in violent marriages were as likely to have witnessed their own fathers assaulting their mothers and were three times a likely as women in non-violent marriages to state that their spouse had witnessed violence as a child.[3]
- The same study found that men who were exposed to violence in childhood also tended to inflict more serious and repeated assaults on their wives than men without this early exposure.[4]
- In 1993, 78% of women who stayed in a transition home indicated that at some point their children had witnessed the violence against them.[5]
- It has been estimated that if children are living in a violent home, 80% of them will witness an episode of abuse against their mother.[6]
- An analysis of 363 police files documenting cases of family violence in Prince Edward Island between 1996–98 revealed that children were present in 207 of the cases (57%).[7]

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- According to the 1994 Nova Scotia Family Violence Tracking Project, slightly less than half (45% or 417) of the 929 victims of spousal abuse had children under the age of 18 residing in the home, for a total of 691 children. *In almost half of the homes where children were present (48% or 199), the children witnessed the incident.* Further, in 10% (43) of the 471 homes with children, the children had been threatened by the suspect.[8]
- In the same study, 24% of women were abused when their partners exercised court ordered access rights to the children.[9]
- It has been estimated that the extent of overlap between woman abuse and child physical or sexual abuse is approximately 30% to 40%.[10]

IMPACT ON CHILDREN /BEHAVIOURAL INDICATORS

Abuse has been found to have a variety of negative consequences. Violence against a parent, usually a mother, can affect parenting skills, reducing coping skills and the ability to parent effectively.

Infants will often suffer developmental delays, excessive separation anxiety, sleep disturbances and disruptions in their feeding schedule, and some fail to thrive. More immediate risks for infants include the potential for them to be caught in the "crossfire" by being accidentally hit or dropped during a violent incident.

School-age children exposed to a violent household will often suffer psychological effects such as depression, anxiety, confusion, a loss of self-esteem, anger, aggression, fear and withdrawal. It is not uncommon for children to feel that they are responsible for the violence. A child's behaviour can also be negatively affected. Because children who witness violence often perceive punishment as love, many often seek punishment and "love" with behaviours such as lying or stealing. They may become aggressive, accident prone, self-destructive, and have difficulty concentrating in school. Conversely, children can exhibit perfectionist behaviour or display an irrational fear of failure. Many children display physical or psychosomatic symptoms of exposure to violence. They may complain of headaches, stomach aches and insomnia. Pre-school age children who witness violence often suffer sleep disturbances, insomnia, bed wetting, excessive clinging and separation anxiety.

Adolescents, because they are confronted by additional stresses associated with teenage years, are particularly vulnerable to destructive behaviours such as drug and alcohol abuse, running away from home, becoming suicidal, engaging in criminal activities, and escaping into pregnancy or early marriage.[11]

Boys who witness violence in the home often exhibit aggression, disruptive behaviour, and have the potential to repeat patterns of violence in their own dating relationships. Boys often adopt a rigid gender role identification.

Girls often react by internalizing their feelings, becoming depressed, passive, and overly compliant. Many girls will tolerate abusive behaviour in their own dating relationships, mistaking violence as an indication of love.

LONG TERM EFFECTS

Intergenerational violence: One of the most serious long term effects of children witnessing violence is the transmission of abusive behaviour in subsequent generations. Violence in the home becomes a model by which the child learns aggressive behaviour and simultaneously learns that the behaviour is an acceptable means of resolving conflict.

It is important to note, however, that not all boys will behave violently and not all girls will end up in an abusive relationship.

Education and social skills: Some research has shown that adolescents who witness violence in the home often drop out of school or can engage in violent criminal behaviour. Research also suggests that children exposed to violence often develop poor social skills, which might have an impact on their ability to function as healthy, productive adults.[12]

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Reporting: If you suspect a child is being harmed by exposure to an abusive environment, you have a legal responsibility to report your concerns to a child welfare agency or the police.[14]

Education: Being informed about the impact of family violence on children and adolescents is an important step in prevention. Support an increased awareness on the part of teachers and guidance counsellors about the effects of family violence on students. Schools should be encouraged to provide information packages to students, and use available resources such as educational videos, books, and community resource people.

Public awareness: There are many ways to broaden awareness of family violence and its impact on children. Support public awareness campaigns through volunteering your time, making donations and distributing educational materials such as posters and crisis phone numbers in prominent public areas.

Support available resource/services such as transition houses, block parents, group counselling for children who witness family violence and crisis hotlines. In addition to offering programming for children, many transition houses offer group counselling for children who witness violence.

Give children helpful messages. For example:

"You don't have to keep secrets when you feel sad or scared."

"You are not to blame when Dad hits Mom."

"Anger and frustration is normal, violence is not."

"It's okay to feel angry with Mom and Dad. It doesn't mean you don't love them."

"There are safe places for Mom to go with you."[13]

ENDNOTES

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2 Ibid.

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4 Ibid.

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Fact Sheet 7

ELDER ABUSE

WHAT IS ELDER ABUSE?

Elder abuse is the neglect and/or physical, psychological or sexual maltreatment of an older adult. Abuse can occur inside a family dwelling or outside the home, such as in seniors' facilities, hospitals and nursing homes.

PREVALENCE

- A national survey revealed that 4% of the Canadian population 65 years of age or older living in private dwellings experienced at least one type of abuse.[1]
- According to this same study, financial abuse was found to be the most common form of abuse, occurring in 50% of the cases. Chronic verbal aggression (psychological abuse) occurred in one third of the cases.[2]
- In 1992, 42% of physical assaults committed against people 65 years of age or older that were reported to the police involved accused persons who were related to the senior.[3]
- Between 1981–1992, spouses were the most common suspects in family-related homicides against seniors (41%) and four-fifths of spousal homicide victims were women. A son or daughter of the senior was responsible in over one-third of cases and other family members in about one-fifth of cases.[4]
- In 1994/95, 38% of the Adult Protection caseload was comprised of elder abuse and caregiver neglect. 32% (318) of the caseload was comprised of persons with a disability. Of those, 115 (36%) experienced abuse or neglect by a caregiver. In 1996–97, 37 % of the overall Adult Protection caseload was comprised of abuse and neglect of vulnerable adults. (The remainder was self-neglect).[5]

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

- Both men and women are victims, but women over the age of 70 tend to be most at risk.[6]
- People who live alone or who are socially or geographically isolated are more vulnerable to abuse.
- Adults who have health conditions which limit daily activity or mobility and those who are mentally or physically infirm thus requiring a higher degree of dependence on a caregiver, are most vulnerable to abuse.

WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

- Adult children — son/son-in-law, daughter, daughter-in-law or other relatives
- Spouse/partner, mostly men, often an extension of wife abuse into old age
- Other caregivers

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TYPES OF ABUSE

Physical abuse: the non-accidental, wilful infliction of physical pain or injury such as slapping, kicking, punching, burning, choking, stabbing and/or shooting. It also includes physical coercion such as forced feeding and the use of restraints.

Sexual abuse: any form of sexual activity with a person without the consent of that person. Sexual abuse may include unwanted sexual touching, sexual relations without voluntary consent or the forcing or coercing of degrading, humiliating or painful sexual acts.

Psychological/emotional abuse: behaviour intended to control, instill fear, cause a person to fear for their safety or diminish a person's sense of self worth. This includes persistent verbal aggression, forcing a victim to do degrading things, forced confinement, social isolation (e.g. refusal to allow access to grandchildren or other family members/friends), intimidation, humiliation, degradation, threats to harm the victim or others, threats to destroy pets or property, threats to institutionalize the person, and deliberately doing things to frighten the victim. Removal of decision-making power, removal/refusal to provide aids for mobility (wheelchair, cane), use of or threats to use restraints, and the infantalization of the elderly (treating the elder like a child) is also abuse.

Financial exploitation: withholding of finances, trickery, fraud, theft, misappropriation of funds or property, misuse of power of attorney, theft of pension cheques, forcing the elder to change the terms of their will, theft of securities or bonds and misuse of assets.

Neglect: failure to provide the necessities of life such as proper food, fluids, suitable clothing, a safe and sanitary place of shelter, proper medical attention, personal care, and necessary supervision is also abuse.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

There are several factors that can account for elder abuse.

- **Caregiver stress:** often abuse can stem from stresses in a caregiver's life. Adult children who care for their parents often face the additional demands of children, jobs and financial burdens of caring for an adult in their home. Abuse can be a direct result of the stressful social conditions under which one lives or a lack of information or resources to provide appropriate care.
- **Deficiencies in the Caregiver:** Some caregivers may also have substance abuse problems, poor impulse control and other issues affecting their capacity to care for others.
- **Unresolved Family Conflict/ Abusive Behaviour Patterns:** Abuse can often be an extension into old age of wife abuse inflicted by a partner. As well, if the family history was abusive, adult children may simply repeat the abuse patterns they endured as children.
- **Increased level of vulnerability:** As adults grow older, they may gradually have to depend on a caregiver for daily care and emotional support due to physical or cognitive impairment or reduced mobility. An increase in the level of dependence on a caregiver can often leave an adult vulnerable to abuse and neglect.
- **Ageism:** Public perceptions of the elderly can often include notions that they are frail, sick, dependent and unproductive. A belief in this kind of negative imagery is defined as ageism. Those who adhere to this kind of prejudice often subject older adults to maltreatment. This contributes to infantilization of the elderly — treating seniors like children who are unable to make their own decisions.

WHY ELDERS MAY NOT DISCLOSE ABUSE

Fear — Many older adults who suffer abuse are frightened of their abuser and will not report the abuse because they fear for their personal safety or that of others.

Isolation — Many older adults fear that if they report abuse, the caregiver could isolate them from their family or refuse to let them see their grandchildren or other family members socially.

Threat of Institutionalization — Fear of being institutionalized is often a reason for older adult keeping silent about their abuse.

Withdrawal of Services — Because many older adults are dependent on their caregiver, they fear that disclosing incidents of abuse will cause a caregiver to withdraw his or her services.

Shame — Sometimes older adults are ashamed of the abuse or are too proud to disclose the abuse. As well, they may feel shame for having raised a child who would abuse his or her parent.

Denial/Self-blame — Older adults sometimes blame themselves for the abuse or deny that the behaviour is abusive.

Family Break-up — Understandably, many older adults are afraid to break up their family. In cases where a family is dependent on an older adult's monthly cheques, there may be a fear that disclosing the abuse will break up the family and cause financial hardship.[7]

MANDATORY REPORTING

The Nova Scotia *Adult Protection Act* requires anyone with suspicions that an adult may be in need of protective services to report to Adult Protection staff . The Act provides protection to adults residing in their own homes who, by reason of mental or physical infirmity, are unable to protect themselves. (*Nova Scotia Adult Protection Act*, Sec. 5, 2)

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

As a family or community member:

- Challenge ageist attitudes and beliefs which devalue older adults. Treat older adults with the respect and dignity they deserve.
- Respect and support the ability of older adults to continue making independent decisions about finances, living arrangements and other concerns of daily living.
- Work with older adults to empower them to make healthy relationship choices and offer alternatives to remaining in abusive situations.
- Participate in and support public awareness about the problem of elder abuse. Support a zero tolerance attitude towards elder abuse.
- Support educational programs that would increase an understanding about the dynamics of aging.
- Create a community of concern by providing an empathetic ear, watchful eye and a supportive hand to a senior who needs it. Enhancing informal support networks may provide the opportunity for early intervention for those who may become at risk.
- Intervene to protect a senior from abuse. Provide support to those caring for seniors.

As a Senior

- Be aware that you do not deserve abuse and are not to blame.
- Inform yourself and seek out options for your financial security and personal care.
- Ask others for help if you need it.

As a caregiver:

- Be familiar with outside resources and support services which may help you to maintain a healthy, positive relationship with an adult in your care. Ask for help from a family member and others when you need it.
- Caring for an older adult can be demanding and stressful, particularly if you are also caring for children and working as well. Attend counselling sessions and support groups to help in times of stress.
- Recognize your limits. If you think you may become abusive, make other arrangements for the adult in your care.
- Be patient and non-judgmental with an adult in your care. Try to establish a relationship that empowers both you and the older adult.

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Fact Sheet 8

ABUSE OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM "DISABILITY?"

The World Health Organization defines a disability as any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being. Types of disability include: mobility, agility, hearing, vision, speech, and others such as mental disabilities, cognitive disabilities and learning disabilities. An individual may have more than one disability.

PREVALENCE

- It has been estimated that persons with disabilities are approximately one-and-one half times more likely to encounter violence against themselves than the population at large.[1]
- In 1994, 39% of ever-married females with disabilities were physically or sexually assaulted by their partners. 74% experienced physical violence and 38% experienced sexual violence.[2]
- 40% of women with disabilities have been assaulted, sexually assaulted or abused.[3]
- It has been estimated that approximately 83% of women with a disability will be sexually assaulted within their lifetime.[4]
- One study noted that 39–68% of girls and 16–30% of boys with intellectual disabilities will be sexually abused before 18 years of age.[5]
- A 1994 study found that males with disabilities are twice as likely than males without disabilities to be sexually abused in their lifetime.[6]

In Nova Scotia:

- Nova Scotia has the highest rate of persons with disabilities in Canada at 21.3% compared to the national average of 15.5%. Of those with a disability, 54% of individuals over the age of 15 have reported a moderate or severe level of disability.[7]
- 32% (318) of the Adult Protection active caseload in 1994 was comprised of persons with a disability. Of those, 36% (115) experienced abuse or neglect by others.

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE VULNERABLE TO ABUSE?

The factors that make people susceptible to abuse are often the very same factors that cause a person to refrain from reporting their abuse. Persons with disabilities are often more vulnerable to abuse by reason of:

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- **Dependence upon a caregiver:** A person's dependence upon a caregiver can often skew the balance of power in a relationship making victims vulnerable to abuse. Often a person with a disability who suffers from abuse will refrain from reporting it because they fear the caregiver will withdraw services. As well, many victims will not disclose incidents of abuse out of fear for their own safety or that of others.
- **Lack of access to support services** is another factor that can leave a person with disabilities susceptible to abuse.
- **Individuals with mobility, cognitive or communication impairments** may be unable to flee/obtain help or report their abuse, or may not be seen as credible when they do. Victims, because of their disability, are often seen to lack credibility as witnesses. Others may not be aware that what they are experiencing is abuse.
- **The societal view** that persons with disabilities are somehow "not perfect," devalues them, contributes to a diminished sense of worth and creates a climate conducive to abuse.
- Often persons with disabilities are victimized because of **myths** that they are asexual, immune to pain and suffering, or experience no physical sensations. These false perceptions serve to perpetuate the belief that victims are not negatively affected by abuse.

WHO ARE THE VICTIMS?

Men, women and children with disabilities can be victims of abuse. Research has shown, however, that women and children are particularly vulnerable to abuse.

WHO ARE THE PERPETRATORS?

- Offenders often have economic or social power over those they abuse. They may threaten to withdraw services or supports upon which the victim depends.
- 33% of offenders are friends or acquaintances, 33% are natural or foster family members, and 25% are caregivers or service providers.[8]
- Parents, husbands/boyfriends/ex-boyfriends are common offenders, as are brothers, uncles and grandfathers.
- Persons with disabilities must often depend on a variety of people to provide them with assistance and care. This large number of people and the intimate physical and emotional contact involved in the care they provide can greatly increase the risk of abuse to persons with disabilities.[9]

TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- **Physical abuse:** infliction of pain and injury such as hitting, shaking, inappropriate handling, administering inappropriate medication or poisonous substances, suffocation, confinement, forced feeding and the use of restraints (tying the person to a chair or bed).
- **Sexual abuse:** includes involuntary, forced sexual contact such as kissing, fondling, and intercourse. Forcing an individual to have an abortion or submit to sterilization are also considered to be forms of abuse.
- **Psychological/emotional abuse:** behaviour intended to control, instill fear or diminish a person's sense of self worth. This includes persistent verbal aggression, forcing the victim to do degrading things, forced confinement, social isolation, intimidation, humiliation, degradation, threats to harm the victim or others, threats to destroy pets or property, and

deliberately doing things to frighten the victims such as playing with weapons. Removal of decision-making power, refusal/removal of aids necessary for mobility (wheelchair or crutches), preventing the person from communicating by restraining his/her hands, and threats to withdraw services or send the person to an institution are other examples.

- **Financial abuse:** the involuntary control of a victim's financial resources, including withholding money for basic necessities such as food, clothing, medication, and transportation. As well, economic abuse can include preventing a victim from getting to work or denying access to employment altogether. Denial of the right to control one's financial affairs is abuse.
- **Neglect:** failure to provide the necessities of life such as proper food, fluids, suitable clothing, safe and sanitary place of shelter, proper medical attention and personal hygiene, general care and supervision, (e.g. leaving the victim in unsafe conditions).

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Caregiver stress: Caregiver or family stress may precipitate the abuse of a person with a disability. Often the abuser will blame the victim for the abuse, contending that the disability itself "provokes" the abuse.

Learned behaviour: Some perpetrators accept abusive behaviour as the norm in dealing with conflict or stress in relationships. This is often due to the fact that the abuser, through his or her own exposure to abuse, has learned this behaviour to be acceptable.

Negative stereotypes: Societal perceptions of persons with disabilities often hold that they are burdensome, passive or worthless. Such denigrating attitudes can often contribute to abusive behaviour on the part of caregivers.

MANDATORY REPORTING

The Nova Scotia *Adult Protection Act* requires anyone with suspicions that an adult may be in need of protective services to report to Adult Protection staff . The Act provides protection to adults residing in their own homes who, by reason of mental or physical infirmity, are unable to protect themselves. (*Nova Scotia Adult Protection Act*, Sec. 5, 2)

WHAT YOU CAN DO

As a member of the community

- Challenge attitudes and beliefs which devalue persons with a disability.
- Recognize and respect the fact that many persons with disabilities are able to exercise independent decision-making about finances, living arrangements and other concerns of daily life.
- Work with persons with disabilities to empower them to make healthy relationship choices and offer alternatives to remaining in abusive situations.
- Support resources and support systems in your community.
- Support endeavours to raise public awareness about persons with disabilities and related issues. This includes educational campaigns in schools, workplaces and universities.
- Be aware of your **legal obligation** to report any suspicion that a person with a disability may be in need of protective services.

If you are a caregiver

- Seek out information support and resources to replenish your energies and ensure you are able to give appropriate care.
- Being a caregiver can often be stressful and demanding. Attending counselling sessions and support groups can help in times of stress.

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Fact Sheet 9

DATING VIOLENCE

WHAT IS DATING VIOLENCE?

Dating violence is the sexual, physical, emotional or psychological abuse of one partner by the other in a dating relationship. Adolescent girls and women are the predominant victims of dating violence, although some teenaged boys and men can experience violence in their dating relationships. Abuse against women is significantly more severe and pervasive. Teens are especially vulnerable as they are at the stage of forming their first intimate relationships and are often unsure of themselves and what to expect in a relationship.

TYPES OF ABUSE

- **Physical abuse:** punching, slapping, kicking, shoving, choking, hair pulling, striking with an object, assault with a weapon and physical confinement.
- **Sexual abuse:** any form of sexual activity with a person without the consent of that person, with the exception of children who, in most circumstances, cannot consent.[1] Sexual abuse may include unwanted sexual touching, sexual relations without voluntary consent, or the forcing or coercing of degrading, humiliating or painful sexual acts.
- **Emotional/psychological abuse:** behaviour intended to control, humiliate, intimidate instill fear or diminish a person's sense of self worth. It can involve threatening, or terrorizing the partner, stalking, extreme and irrational expressions of jealousy, isolating the partner, threatening the victim's family members, and destroying personal property.

PREVALENCE

- The Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women found that 11% of young women in Nova Scotia faced sexual abuse within dating relationships, 32% experienced emotional abuse and 18% faced physical abuse.[2]
- A 1989 survey of 216 high school girls in Cumberland County, Nova Scotia found that 40% reported experiencing physical and/or emotional abuse in a dating relationship.[3]
- The National Violence Against Women Survey estimated that 1.7 million Canadian women have been involved in at least one incident of sexual or physical assault by a date or boyfriend since the age of 16. This represents 16% of all women.
- Half of all women the who reported an incident of dating violence were between the ages of 18–34.[4]
- In a 1992 national survey of 3142 Canadian college and university students, female students reported overall rates of sexual abuse of 45% since leaving high school. A total of 35% of female students said they had been physically assaulted in a dating relationship. 17% of males said they had been physically violent towards a date since leaving high school.[5]

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CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

Patriarchy theory: Society's belief in male dominance often contributes to violence in intimate relationships. It is argued that the use of violence by males is reinforced by sexist ideology and the notion that males are superior. Though we have seen increasing changes in these gender values, there are males who feel it is their right to punish, control, or batter their partners.[6]

Peer pressure: Within adolescent groups, there is often a pressure for boys to be sexually active and/or sexually aggressive which can contribute to sexually abusive behaviour and date rape.

Intergenerational violence: Children who are victims of family violence or who witness abuse in the home can often repeat abusive patterns of behaviour in adolescence and adulthood. Children exposed to violence often learn that violence is an acceptable means of conflict resolution. Similarly, girls who witness violence in the home will often tolerate abusive behaviour in their own dating relationships.

Social Learning Theory: Today's youth are constantly exposed to violent and sexist images in the media. These images convey the notion that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict and that girls/women are acceptable targets. This may influence some people to replicate that behaviour, particularly if the viewer identifies with, emulates or is desensitized by violent images.[7]

WHY DO YOUNG WOMEN STAY IN ABUSIVE DATING RELATIONSHIPS?

- Many girls stay in abusive relationships because of peer pressure to have a boyfriend. In a 1989 study of 216 adolescent girls in Nova Scotia, 26% of the girls said they would rather have a boyfriend than be alone.[8]
- Many young women have difficulty identifying abuse, particularly in the case of sexual abuse. There is a common misconception that rape and sexual abuse are committed by strangers, therefore victims who have been sexually assaulted by their partners tend not to identify the incident as rape.
- Some girls stay in abusive relationships because they hope their partners will change. Fitzpatrick's (1989) study notes that 54% believed their partner would change, and 47% thought they could change their partner's behaviour. Thirty-two percent of the girls stayed with their partners because they believed they needed their love and support.[9]

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT DATING VIOLENCE?

Many of the solutions to preventing dating violence are the same as woman abuse.

Education: High schools and universities are an influential means of providing information and counselling to students with regard to dating violence. Educational programs that teach students about healthy relationships and appropriate, non-violent ways to resolve conflict can prevent dating violence. Young men and women should know that:

- Abuse is always wrong and no one deserves to be abused. Violence is a crime, whether the abuser is a stranger, friend or a partner.
- One always has the right to say no to unwanted sexual activity. No one has the right to force sexual activity on another person. Any sexual act committed against a person without their consent is against the law.

- Controlling, possessive or jealous behaviour in a dating relationship should not be mistaken for love. Relationships should always be based on trust, equality and mutual respect.

Youth involvement: As teens you can

- Stage dramatic productions to raise awareness and convey the message of prevention to your peers.
- Take a stand against violence by working to create a school environment that embraces positive, healthy relationships among peers and dating partners. As students, you can form "anti-violence" committees to provide peer support and information about dating and youth violence.
- For girls, support a friend who may be experiencing violence in a dating relationship by encouraging her to seek help/talk to someone. For guys, adopt a zero tolerance attitude towards violence in dating relationships, and support the message that you don't have to hit to be "cool".

Community awareness: Communities can highlight the issue of dating violence through public awareness campaigns and prevention programs. Public libraries can offer information packages and reading material on dating violence. As a community member, you can support available resources for youth, sexual assault centres, and local public awareness initiatives. Local businesses can become involved by displaying posters and phone numbers of available resources for youth experiencing violence.

Campus awareness: Universities can provide resources to students such as information, counselling, support centres, crisis hotlines and educational workshops on issues of dating violence.

As parents/guardians: Help young people build their self-esteem by encouraging them to talk about the things that bother them, listening respectfully, encouraging them to express their likes and dislikes, acknowledging their achievements, being positive when correcting them, and teaching them that jealousy and forced intimacy in relationships is not a sign of love.[10]

Sexual Assault Centres: provide public education, counselling, support, information and referral to victims of sexual assault and their advocates, partners, family members and others. Call for help.

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Fact Sheet 10

FAMILY VIOLENCE IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Although family violence can be found in all cultural, racial and religious groups, victims of family violence in Aboriginal communities face a number of additional concerns when seeking to escape an abusive environment. Often victims who are forced to leave their community experience the distress of having to abandon their support system, kinship network and cultural roots.

PREVALENCE OF ABUSE IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

- It is estimated that between 75% and 90% of women in some northern Aboriginal communities are abused. The same study found that 40% of children in Northern communities had been physically abused by a family member.[1]
- A study by the Ontario Native Women's Association found that 8 out of 10 Aboriginal women in Ontario had personally experienced family violence. Of these women, 87% had experienced physical injury and 57% had been sexually abused.[2]
- A national study by the Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada indicates that Aboriginal women and children under 15 years of age are most frequently physically abused.[3]
- A Northwest Territories survey found that 80% of Aboriginal girls and 50% of Aboriginal boys under 8-years-old were sexually abused.[4]
- One study found that on some Aboriginal reserves, 100% of all Aboriginal children had been taken into temporary or permanent care at some point.[5]

CONTEXTUAL/CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

While not causes of family violence, certain factors can contribute to the prevalence of family violence.

Poverty and unemployment

- Many Aboriginal communities exist in conditions of extreme poverty and unemployment. Statistics show that more than 70% of Aboriginal households live below the poverty line. Unemployment ranges from 50–90% in some Aboriginal communities. Much of the economic crisis facing Aboriginal communities originates in their colonization and their removal from mainstream social, economic and political structures.[6]
- Aboriginal women have less education and are less likely to be employed than other Canadian women.[7]

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- Living conditions in most Aboriginal communities continue to be substandard. It is estimated that 35% of the Aboriginal population living off-reserve is in need of housing. Overcrowded housing, poverty, poor health, chronic unemployment and substandard living conditions can exacerbate tensions within families and perpetuate violence. Similarly, poverty and isolation make it difficult for victims to leave abusive situations.[9]

Alcohol/substance abuse

- Alcohol and substance abuse is prevalent in Aboriginal communities. One study found that alcohol abuse was common in 93% of Aboriginal communities and drug abuse was common in 81%.[9]

Intergenerational violence

- The effects of the residential school system have contributed to intergenerational violence. Children who were subjected to abusive treatment in schools are more likely to have learned poor parenting skills and to pass that violence on to their families in adulthood.[10]

STRUGGLES/ BARRIERS MAKING IT DIFFICULT FOR VICTIMS TO LEAVE ABUSIVE SITUATIONS

For women

- Access to information (e.g. legal rights) and support services (e.g. transition houses, crisis centres) is often difficult for women who live in geographically isolated communities. Sometimes women must travel long distances from their community to seek help.
- Leaving an abusive situation can be difficult for victims of abuse in Aboriginal communities because they must often abandon their kinship ties, support network, cultural community and sense of identity. This can also cause feelings of isolation and distress.
- If services are accessible, women often face a number of additional barriers and concerns. These can include:
  - fear of losing one's children
  - fear of being misunderstood by support staff
  - lack of resources to obtain treatment or support
  - a perception that services are not culturally relevant[11]
  - a misunderstanding and/or fear of the justice system and law enforcement officials
  - a lack of anonymity in seeking services on reserve as these are usually very small communities.

For persons with disabilities

- Aboriginal persons with disabilities often have difficulties in accessing help for abuse, as some community-based services cannot accommodate the specific needs of women with disabilities. Further, services in urban centres may be perceived as culturally inappropriate.[12]

Aboriginal children/youth

- Aboriginal children who experience family violence and who witness violence against their mothers suffer long term emotional and behavioural problems. As well, children may grow up normalizing abusive behaviour and replicating this behaviour in their own relationships. The cycle of violence is therefore perpetuated, making it difficult for victims to break free from the violence.[13]
- There is an alarming rate of substance abuse among children and youth in Aboriginal communities, yet treatment programs often remain inaccessible. This may leave children vulnerable to abuse and places significant barriers on a child/youth's ability to leave an abusive environment.[14]

Seniors

- Older adults in Aboriginal communities who experience abuse often do not report their abuse for fear of being sent away to a seniors' residence, or because they have nowhere to go in their own community. Many remain isolated and unable to access support services or in-home care.[15]

THE PATH TO HEALING: WHAT'S BEEN DONE

- Many Aboriginal communities have returned to traditional approaches to healing and recovery from abuse. This includes the use of pipe ceremonies, sweat lodges, talking circles and sentencing circles. Based on a principle of holistic healing, these traditional practises attempt to address the emotional, physical and spiritual needs of victims.[16]
- In Nova Scotia, many steps have been taken to identify and address the needs of both victims and abusers with a view to promoting culturally relevant services. The Mi'kmaq Family Treatment Centres, located in the Waycobah and Millbrook First Nation communities, serve as one of the main support systems for Mi'kmaq men, women and children. The Centres offer such resources as counselling, community education, outreach services, referrals and supports for the whole family.
- Mi'kmaq Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia provides treatment, protection and prevention services to all thirteen Mi'kmaq First Nations Bands of Nova Scotia.
- The Sexual Abuse Disclosure Training Program, a three week program which trained front line workers how to appropriately handle disclosures of sexual abuse, took place in Nova Scotia in the fall of 1998. Some participants of the training program included staff from the Mi'kmaq Family Treatment Centres, the Mi'kmaq Justice Institute, the Eskasoni Counselling agency, members of the Unama'ki Tribal Police, the Atlantic First Nation AIDS Task Force, pre-school workers from Millbrook, and staff from the "Brighter Futures" program of the Membertou band.
- The Mi'kmaq Young Offender Project, a community-based restorative youth justice project, was established. This program primarily serves the Cape Breton area.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Support Aboriginal communities in addressing family violence both on and off-reserve.
- Support efforts to enhance cultural sensitivity among non-Aboriginal service providers.

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Fact Sheet 11

ABUSE IN ETHNO-CULTURAL AND NEW CANADIAN COMMUNITIES

Family violence exists in all communities and cuts across all ethno-cultural, racial, class, socio-economic and religious groups. Victims of family violence in New Canadian, refugee and ethno-cultural communities which are not "mainstream" often face additional challenges and barriers in escaping family violence.

PREVALENCE

To date, there exist no comprehensive studies examining rates of family violence in New Canadian and ethno-cultural communities. Smaller studies have explored rates of abuse in some specific communities but figures generated from these studies cannot be applied to a larger population due to their small sample size.

- A 1993 study of 64 women from 4 separate ethno-cultural communities in Montreal revealed that 69% of respondents experienced some form of abuse.[1]

ISSUES FACED BY NEW CANADIANS

- Culture shock has a profound effect on almost everyone who becomes involved with a new culture. Culture shock is the physical and emotional upset that comes from having one's familiar environment or boundaries greatly changed. Its symptoms (such as homesickness, depression, anger, anxiety) are often not readily understood or recognized, even by those affected by it. While some individuals are able to adjust and function in a new culture, this is a very difficult and prolonged process for some people. Culture shock can increase feelings of stress, powerlessness, frustration and anger, which may contribute to or exacerbate the problem of abuse in families.[2]

For women

- New Canadian women who experience abuse often fear being ostracized from their community if they identify or seek help for abuse. Women who are from cultures that stigmatize divorce or family problems are often afraid of "shaming" their communities if they "break up" the family. In many cultures, women are thought of as "keepers of the family" and are obligated to keep the family together regardless of their circumstances. Abuse is considered a private matter, therefore many women believe they must keep disclosures of abuse within their own family network.[3]
- Many victims will not report abuse to police because of real or perceived experiences of racism when dealing with justice officials. Individuals from countries where the police or military have been instruments of state oppression often do not view police or other justice officials in Canada as a source of help.

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- Some cultures may have rigidly defined gender roles, traditions, norms and values that are not consistent with Canadian law and/or which may permit abusive behaviour against women and children. It can be difficult, therefore, for some New Canadian women to identify their circumstances as abusive.
- Women who are being sponsored by their husbands while awaiting immigration status are particularly vulnerable to abuse or intimidation on the part of their spouses, largely because they fear their spouse may withdraw sponsorship. However, in the case of sponsorship breakdown due to violent or abusive behaviour, this does not automatically result in denial of Canadian citizenship for the victim, and there are additional remedies to consider in her case. Similarly, abused women may not seek help for abuse because they believe that if they contact the criminal justice system, their husbands could be deported.
- Language barriers can pose problems for abused women if they are unable to understand what resource and support services are available to them. Similarly, language barriers make it difficult for many New Canadian women to obtain employment, increasing their financial dependency on their husbands.[4]

For elders

Many of the same factors that contribute to elder abuse in the general population occur in immigrant and New Canadian communities. Some unique barriers experienced by New Canadian seniors, however, can make them particularly vulnerable to abuse.

- Language barriers have been identified as one of the most common factors that can contribute to or perpetuate abuse against New Canadian seniors. A national survey of 147 service providers revealed that 38% believed seniors' inability to communicate in either official language could leave them susceptible to abuse and exploitation, primarily because language barriers can result in dependence and isolation, making both disclosure and access to services significantly more difficult.[5]
- Social isolation due to physical limitations or an unfamiliarity with surrounding communities can leave New Canadian seniors vulnerable to abuse. In the absence of a social network, abuse may be more easily hidden and seniors are unlikely to seek help. As well, when seniors arrive in Canada, their social status is usually lost. Their increasing economic, social and emotional dependence may place a strain on the family, making the senior more vulnerable to abuse as a result. Thirty-one percent of service providers and 24% of ethno cultural community leaders surveyed identified social isolation as being a significant contributing factor with respect to elder abuse.[6]
- Many New Canadian seniors do not have savings or a pension when arriving in Canada. Often they become financially dependent on their children or caregivers, increasing the potential for neglect or exploitation. Emotional dependence has similarly been identified as a factor that puts seniors at risk. Adult children or other family members may take advantage of a senior's emotional dependence through manipulation or neglect.
- New Canadian seniors who are sponsored by their families are particularly dependent on others. As such, abusive behaviour such as threatening to withdraw sponsorship can cause seniors to refrain from reporting their abuse. As well, fear of abandonment, deportation and institutionalization often deters seniors from disclosing abuse. These fears are often rooted in a lack of understanding of their legal and human rights, or a fear of the Canadian criminal justice system.

- Cultural taboos against revealing "private" family issues serve as another deterrent against reporting abuse. As with New Canadian women who experience abuse, seniors are reluctant to "bring shame" to their families.

For children

- In some ethno-cultural communities, child abuse can often remain a hidden issue for several reasons. As with other forms of family violence, there is a fear that disclosing incidents of child abuse will bring shame to the community.
- Mothers or other caretakers may refrain from seeking help because of fears that their child will be taken away from them. Similarly, the same issues that hinder disclosure of other forms of family violence emerge in the context of child abuse. Caretakers may refrain from reporting abuse because of language barriers, and a misunderstanding of the justice system and mainstream social service agencies. There is a great lack of familiarity with the social system and awareness of laws that protect women, children and vulnerable adults because, in many other countries, these legislated services do not exist.
- Differences in cultural beliefs about disciplining children have the potential to obscure definitions of child abuse and can make it difficult to identify abusive behaviour.
- Stress has been identified as a significant factor that can contribute to child abuse. The stresses imposed by language barriers, feelings of isolation, and separation from family and friends, and financial difficulties can cause parents to become frustrated and angry, increasing the potential for abusive behaviour.

Intergenerational conflicts/culture clashes

- Tensions between parents and children may arise when parents try to instill traditional cultural norms and values in children who are growing up in the mainstream Canadian culture. Children may possess more extensive knowledge of Canadian culture and laws or have better command of the English or French language and this may upset the traditional balance of power and parental authority in families. Parents may feel their only recourse is physical violence.
- Language barriers can pose problems when parents rely on their children for interpretation. Children may withhold information, which causes feelings of powerlessness in parents.
- Shifting roles and values affect women, men, children and seniors and can result in intergenerational conflicts and cultural clashes. Children may more readily embrace new cultural values, while other family members struggle to hold on to the value systems of their homeland. Often New Canadians may be unable to practise the profession for which they are qualified as their professional credentials are not recognized. This affects self-esteem, financial and social status of both the individual and the family, and traditional roles in the family. Often New Canadian women must assume the role of provider of the family, upsetting the traditional roles. Further, class consciousness is much more overt in many cultures than it is in Canadian society and the ability to move among social strata is more inhibited. Therefore, the loss of social status and one's position in society is much more threatening. All of these factors can increase the risk of family violence.

NEEDS OF NEW CANADIANS

Legal rights

- Victims of family violence in ethno-cultural communities require increased education concerning Canadian laws. Women need to be better informed of their rights under Canadian law, particularly with respect to immigration and sponsorship rights, woman abuse, separation and divorce, child support and custody, and matrimonial property as well as knowledge of criminal justice remedies such as peace bonds and protection orders. Seniors may require increased education on issues such as power of attorney.

Access to culturally-relevant services

- Access to culturally relevant and sensitive services is important in supporting disclosure and providing information, support and referral to prevent further abuse.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Challenge racist and stereotypical assumptions about ethno-cultural communities by supporting cultural diversity.
- Encourage increased public awareness of the problem of family violence in ethno-cultural communities and support the efforts of these communities to take a leadership role in prevention.
- As service providers, take the opportunity to increase your own cultural sensitivity, knowledge and awareness.

NOVA SCOTIA INITIATIVES/RESOURCES

- The Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association is in its fourth phase of a program designed to raise awareness about family violence in ethno-cultural communities. Some components of MISA's Family Violence Awareness program have included delivering sessions in cross-cultural sensitivity to service providers and training leaders in ethno-cultural communities about family violence.
- As part of the Family Violence Awareness Project, MISA collaborated with the Nova Scotia Family Violence Prevention Initiative to print and re-print a brochure and poster series entitled "Peace Begins at Home". Printed in English, Serbo-Croatian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic and Spanish, the brochures contain information about family violence and provide phone numbers for transition houses and other emergency resources.
- The Initiative provided funding for MISA to produce a children's travelling art exhibit to raise awareness about issues facing New Canadian children and their families. Information sessions with parents were offered to provide parents with information on positive parenting, Canadian laws and community resources.
- With the support of the Department of Education, Canadian Heritage and the Initiative, MISA issued a poster which features a poem entitled "Children Learn What they Live" by Dorothy Nolte. The poem is presented in nine languages including English, Serbo-Croatian, Persian, Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, French and Mi'kmaq.
- MISA printed a booklet about culture shock entitled "The Heart that Breaks is Reborn" which discusses the definition and impact of culture shock on New Canadians.

- In recognition of the need for culturally-relevant support services for victims of family violence, some transition houses and other services have adopted affirmative action policies with respect to their hiring practices.
- In 1996 the Universal Shelter Association was established. Serving Metro Halifax, the Universal Shelter Association is primarily committed to responding to the needs of racial and linguistic minorities.

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Fact Sheet 12

ABUSE IN AFRICAN CANADIAN COMMUNITIES

Family violence exists in all communities and cuts across all ethno-cultural, racial, class, socio-economic and religious groups. Victims of family violence in African-Canadian communities who are seeking help for abuse must often contend with additional challenges and barriers in escaping family violence. They may face the prospect of leaving kinship, social support networks and their own communities.

PREVALENCE

There are very few studies examining the rates of abuse in African-Canadian communities, and to date no nation-wide studies have examined this problem. One Nova Scotia study of 69 African-Canadian women in Pictou County, Nova Scotia found family violence to be a significant problem within that particular community. It should be noted, however, that data from this particular study cannot be applied to a larger population.

- The study of 69 African-Canadian women in Pictou County, Nova Scotia revealed that 51 women interviewed believed abuse to be a problem in the African-Canadian community.
- 32% of those interviewed considered themselves abused.
- Over half of the respondents said they know someone who is being abused.[1]

ISSUES FACED BY AFRICAN-CANADIAN COMMUNITIES

- Historical roots of oppression and discrimination have resulted in an erosion of trust of the African-Canadian communities in the criminal justice and social service systems, making it difficult for victims to turn to them for help. Experiences of racial discrimination in the larger society can often generate feelings of fear and/or mistrust, particularly with respect to law enforcement officials.
- Historically, African-Canadian communities have placed great value on the extended family. Women were often pressured to keep silent about abuse or downplay the severity of the violence. Many victims believe that reporting the abuse would be construed by the family and the community as an "act of betrayal". Because many African-Canadian women understand that their male partners may be similarly subjected to racial discrimination in the larger society, they often find it difficult to report them to those systems in which they may encounter racism. The fear of being ostracized by the community often forces victims to keep silent.
- African-Canadian women have also spoken of the importance of access to support from members/women of their own community. The sense of shared experience is important in feeling supported and understood.

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NOVA SCOTIA INITIATIVES

- The African United Baptist Association Women's Institute took a leadership role in conducting family violence workshops leading to a provincial action plan to respond to family violence.
- A video entitled "No More Secrets" was produced in Nova Scotia to address the issue of violence against women in African Canadian communities. Through interviews with African-Canadian women who have experienced abuse, the video provides valuable insight into why abuse has often been a hidden issue in African Canadian communities. Screened during Family Violence Prevention Week, 1999, "No More Secrets" serves as an important tool in raising awareness about issues affecting African Canadian women in Nova Scotia.

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